

UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

FOR

**GAMING DEVICE HAVING A RE-TRIGGERING SYMBOL BONUS SCHEME
WITH A BONUS SYMBOL ACCUMULATOR**

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5 GAMING DEVICE HAVING A RE-TRIGGERING SYMBOL BONUS SCHEME WITH A BONUS SYMBOL ACCUMULATOR

PRIORITY CLAIM

This application is a continuation-in-part application of U.S. Patent
10 Application Serial No. 09/981,133, filed on October 15, 2001 entitled “Gaming
Device Having a Re-Triggering Symbol Bonus Scheme.”

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20 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates in general to a gaming device, and more particularly to a gaming device having a re-triggering symbol bonus scheme with a bonus symbol accumulator.

The base or primary game of most slot machines involves one or more mechanical or video spinning reels, each of which display a plurality of symbols. In many such games, a triggering event such as a symbol or combination of symbols yield one or more opportunities or chances in a bonus or secondary game, which is played in addition to the base game.

5 It is desirable to provide players with new and different gaming devices with new and different bonus schemes for the enjoyment and entertainment of players.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

One embodiment of the present invention provides a gaming device
10 having a slot base game and a slot bonus game wherein one or more bonus triggering symbols in the base game are employed as bonus re-triggers in the bonus game. In one preferred embodiment, the occurrence of a predetermined combination of a plurality of bonus triggering symbols (such as three bonus triggering symbols along a payline) in a base game triggers a
15 corresponding bonus game. In that bonus game, the same bonus triggering symbols in any position (i.e., a scatter pay) functions as the bonus re-trigger in the bonus game which causes one or more additional activations of the reels or one or more re-triggers of that entire bonus game. The probability of obtaining the bonus re-trigger in the bonus game which is based on the same
20 bonus symbols needed to trigger the bonus game in the base game is greater than the probability of obtaining the bonus trigger in the base game because the combination of bonus triggering symbols can occur anywhere on the reels in the bonus game to cause the bonus re-trigger (i.e., a scatter pay).

Accordingly, the present invention provides a gaming device, which
25 includes a symbol or symbol combination in a primary or base game which triggers a secondary or bonus game, and a symbol or symbol combination in the secondary or bonus game which is more likely to occur in the bonus game and which re-triggers the secondary or bonus game or a portion thereof. More

5 generally, the present invention provides a gaming device which includes a
bonus triggering event in a primary or base game which triggers a secondary
or bonus game and a bonus re-triggering event in the secondary or bonus
game which re-triggers the secondary or bonus game or a portion thereof.
The bonus triggering event in the primary or base game and the bonus re-
10 triggering event in the secondary or bonus game preferably employ the same
symbols or symbol combinations such that the bonus re-triggering event in the
secondary or bonus game is more likely to occur in the bonus game than the
bonus triggering event in the primary or base game.

The bonus re-trigger in the bonus game may, for instance, provide the
15 player a bonus game extension such as additional or free spins in the bonus
game, a replay of the entire bonus game, or a modification to the bonus game
such as changing the bonus re-triggering symbol or bonus re-triggering
combination of symbols in the bonus game. The bonus-retrigger can
alternatively cause other changes in the bonus game as desired by the game
20 implementor. For instance, the bonus re-trigger may cause a modification of
the bonus award pay scale or table such as doubling or tripling subsequent
award values in the bonus game.

In an alternative embodiment of the present invention, an accumulator
accumulates bonus triggering symbols until a pre-determined number of
25 secondary game or bonus re-triggering symbols are obtained by a player in the
secondary game or bonus game. The accumulated bonus re-triggering
symbols are in one embodiment, preferably the same symbol. Additionally, the
bonus re-triggering symbols in the bonus game may be the same symbol as

5 the bonus triggering symbol in the primary game or a different symbol. The accumulator preferably accumulates bonus re-triggering symbols in conjunction with one or more bonus re-triggering events. Once the accumulator accumulates the predetermined number of bonus re-triggering symbols in the bonus game, the gaming device provides the player with a
10 bonus re-trigger. The re-triggering of the bonus game includes at least one re-trigger of the bonus game, at least one additional spin in the bonus game, at least one additional turn, or any combination thereof.

In a further embodiment, the gaming device provides a bonus re-trigger to the player when the accumulator accumulates the bonus triggering symbols
15 in a pre-determined order in the bonus game. In this embodiment, the bonus re-triggering symbols are preferably accumulated one at a time. Alternatively, the symbols may be accumulated in one or more turns.

In yet another embodiment, the gaming device provides a bonus re-trigger to the player when the accumulator accumulates a predetermined
20 number of activated bonus triggering symbols.

It is therefore an advantage of the present invention to provide a gaming device having a re-triggering symbol bonus scheme.

It is another advantage of the present invention to provide a gaming device having a re-triggering symbol bonus scheme in conjunction with other
25 re-triggering symbol bonus schemes.

Other features and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the following detailed disclosure, taken in conjunction with the accompanying

5 sheets of drawings, wherein like numerals refer to like parts, elements, components, steps and processes.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1A is a front elevation view of a general embodiment of the gaming
10 device of the present invention.

Fig. 1B is a front elevation view of a second embodiment of the gaming device of the present invention.

Fig. 2 is a schematic block diagram of the electronic configuration of one embodiment of the gaming device of the present invention.

15 Fig. 3A is an enlarged front elevation view of one of the display devices of Figs. 1A and 1B showing an embodiment of a bonus triggering symbol combination.

Fig. 3B is an enlarged front elevation view of one of the display devices of Figs. 1A and 1B illustrating a bonus re-trigger symbol combination in a
20 bonus game.

Fig. 4 is an enlarged front elevation view of one of the display devices of Figs. 1A and 1B illustrating a bonus re-trigger in a bonus game where a player receives additional spins.

Fig. 5A is an enlarged front elevation view of one of the display devices
25 of Figs. 1A and 1B showing a bonus re-trigger where the bonus re-triggering combination is two "B" symbols on a payline.

Fig. 5B is an enlarged front elevation view of one of the display devices of Figs. 1A and 1B illustrating a bonus re-trigger where the bonus re-triggering symbol is a different symbol.

Fig. 6 is an enlarged front elevation view of one of the display devices of Figs. 1A and 1B wherein the bonus re-trigger includes an award modification.

Figs. 7A, 7B and 7C are enlarged front elevation views of one of the display devices of Figs. 1A and 1B showing an alternative embodiment of the present invention where a player obtains a bonus re-trigger when the player accumulates four "D" symbols.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Gaming Device and Electronics

Referring now to the drawings, two embodiments of the gaming device of the present invention are illustrated in Figs. 1A and 1B as gaming device 10a and gaming device 10b, respectively. Gaming device 10a and/or gaming device 10b are generally referred to herein as gaming device 10. Gaming device 10 is in one embodiment a slot machine having the controls, displays and features of a conventional slot machine. It is constructed so that a player can operate it while standing or sitting, and is preferably mounted in a console or cabinet. However, it should be appreciated that gaming device 10 can be constructed as a pub-style table-top game (not shown) which a player can operate preferably while sitting. Furthermore, gaming device 10 can be constructed with varying cabinet and display designs, as illustrated by the designs shown in Figs. 1A and 1B. Gaming device 10 can also be

5 implemented as a program code stored in a detachable cartridge for operating a hand-held video game device. Also, gaming device 10 can be implemented as a program code stored on a disk or other memory device which a player can use in a desktop or laptop personal computer or other computerized platform.

10 Gaming device 10 may be adapted to incorporate any primary game such as slot, poker, blackjack, keno, or any of the bonus triggering events and any of the bonus round games associated with these games, in conjunction with the present invention. The symbols and indicia used on and in gaming device 10 may be in mechanical, electronic, electrical or video form.

15 As illustrated in Figs. 1A and 1B, gaming device 10 includes a coin slot 12 and bill acceptor 14 where the player inserts money, coins or tokens. The player can place coins in the coin slot 12 or paper money or ticket vouchers in the bill acceptor 14. Other devices could be used for accepting payment such as readers or validators for credit cards or debit cards. When a player inserts
20 money in gaming device 10, a number of credits corresponding to the amount deposited is shown in a credit display 16. After depositing the appropriate amount of money, a player can begin the game by pulling arm 18 or pushing play button 20. Play button 20 can be any play activator used by the player which starts any game or sequence of events in the gaming device.

25 As shown in Figs. 1A and 1B, gaming device 10 also includes a bet display 22 and a bet one button 24. The player places a bet by pushing the bet one button 24. The player can increase the bet by one credit each time the player pushes the bet one button 24. When the player pushes the bet one

5 button 24, the number of credits shown in the credit display 16 decreases by one, and the number of credits shown in the bet display 22 increases by one. The gaming device may also include a conventional bet maximum button (not shown) and conventional payline bet buttons.

10 A player may "cash out" and thereby receive a number of coins corresponding to the number of remaining credits by pushing a cash out button 26. When the player "cashes out," the player receives the coins in a coin payout tray 28. The gaming device 10 may employ other payout mechanisms such as credit slips redeemable by a cashier or electronically recordable cards which keep track of the player's credits.

15 Gaming device 10 also includes one or more display devices. The embodiment shown in Fig. 1A includes a central display device 30, and the alternative embodiment shown in Fig. 1B includes a central display device 30 as well as an upper display device 32. Gaming device 10 in one embodiment displays a plurality of reels 34 such as three to five reels 34 in mechanical or
20 video form at one or more of the display devices. However, it should be appreciated that the display devices can display any visual representation or exhibition, including but not limited to movement of physical objects such as mechanical reels and wheels, dynamic lighting and video images. A display device can be any viewing surface such as glass, a video monitor or screen, a
25 liquid crystal display or any other display mechanism. If the reels 34 are in video form, the display device for the video reels 34 is preferably a video monitor.

5 Each reel 34 displays a plurality of indicia or symbols such as bells, hearts, fruits, numbers, letters, bars or other images or symbols which preferably correspond to a theme associated with the gaming device 10. Furthermore, gaming device 10 preferably includes speakers 36 for making sounds or playing music.

10 As illustrated in Fig. 2, the general electronic combination of gaming device 10 preferably includes: a processor 38; a memory device 40 for storing program code or other data; a central display device 30; an upper display device 32; a sound card 42; a plurality of speakers 36; and one or more input devices 44. The processor 38 is preferably a microprocessor or
15 microcontroller-based platform which is capable of displaying images, symbols and other indicia such as images of people, characters, places, things and faces of cards. The processor may include a main processor and a sub-processor which control certain features of the gaming device in conjunction with the main processor. The memory device 40 can include random access
20 memory (RAM) 46 for storing event data or other data generated or used during a particular game. The memory device 40 can also include read only memory (ROM) 48 for storing program code which controls the gaming device 10 so that it plays a particular game in accordance with applicable game rules and pay tables.

25 As illustrated in Fig. 2, the player preferably uses the input devices 44, such as pull arm 18, play button 20, the bet one button 24 and the cash out button 26 to input signals into gaming device 10. In certain instances it is preferable to use a touch screen 50 and an associated touch screen controller

5 52 instead of a conventional video monitor display device. Touch screen 50
and touch screen controller 52 are connected to a video controller 54 and
processor 38. A player can make decisions and input signals into the gaming
device 10 by touching touch screen 50 at the appropriate places. As further
illustrated in Fig. 2, the processor 38 can be connected to coin slot 12 or bill
10 acceptor 14. The processor 38 can be programmed to require a player to
deposit a certain amount of money in order to start the game.

It should be appreciated that although a processor 38 and memory
device 40 are preferable implementations of the present invention, the present
invention can also be implemented using one or more application-specific
15 integrated circuits (ASIC's) or other hard-wired devices, or using mechanical
devices (collectively referred to herein as a "processor"). Furthermore,
although the processor 38 and memory device 40 preferably reside on each
gaming device 10 unit, it is possible to provide some or all of their functions at
a central location such as a network server for communication to a playing
20 station such as over a local area network (LAN), wide area network (WAN),
Internet connection, microwave link, and the like. The processor 38 and
memory device 40 are generally referred to herein as the "computer" or
"controller."

With reference to Figs. 1A, 1B and 2, to operate the gaming device 10
25 in one embodiment the player must insert the appropriate amount of money or
tokens at coin slot 12 or bill acceptor 14 and then pull the arm 18 or push the
play button 20. The reels 34 will then begin to spin. Eventually, the reels 34
will come to a stop. As long as the player has credits remaining, the player

5 can spin the reels 34 again. Depending upon where the reels 34 stop, the player may or may not win additional credits.

In addition to winning credits in this manner, preferably gaming device 10 also gives players the opportunity to win credits in a bonus round. This type of gaming device 10 will include a program which will automatically begin a bonus round when the player has achieved a qualifying condition in the game. This qualifying condition can be a particular arrangement of indicia on a display device as discussed in detail below. The gaming device 10 in one embodiment uses a video-based central display device 30 to enable the player to play the bonus round. In one embodiment as discussed below, the qualifying condition is a predetermined combination of indicia or symbols appearing on a plurality of reels 34. As illustrated in the five reel slot game shown in Figs. 1A and 1B, the qualifying condition could be the number seven appearing on three adjacent reels 34 along a payline 56. It should be appreciated that the present invention can include one or more paylines, such as payline 56, wherein the paylines can be horizontal, diagonal or any combination thereof.

Bonus Re-Trigger

Referring now to Fig. 3A, a set of mechanical or video reels 34 is generally illustrated having symbols 58 designated as A through F. It should be appreciated that any suitable set of symbols could be used as the symbols 58 in accordance with the present invention. In this embodiment, the "B" symbols 60 are the bonus symbols and the appearance of three "B" symbols

5 on any activated payline such as payline 1, triggers a bonus game as indicated by bonus display 62. Although in this example three "B" symbols are used to trigger the bonus game, it should be appreciated that any symbol combination having the same symbol or designated symbols may be used as the bonus triggering combination.

10 Fig. 3B illustrates one embodiment of the bonus game of the present invention where the bonus re-trigger occurs in the bonus game when the same symbols, which trigger the bonus game in the base game, are displayed in a scattered combination on multiple paylines. In this embodiment, the "B" symbol 60 is the bonus re-trigger symbol and any three "B" symbols on three
15 paylines provides the bonus re-trigger in the bonus game as described in bonus display 64. Accordingly, as described above, in accordance with the present invention, the bonus re-trigger will occur more frequently than the bonus trigger because the bonus trigger will only occur when the bonus triggering symbols are aligned along a payline. The bonus re-trigger, however,
20 will occur when the bonus triggering symbols are aligned along a payline or when the bonus triggering symbols occur along any payline.

Referring now to Fig. 4, one embodiment of the present invention is shown where the bonus re-trigger occurs when one bonus triggering symbol occurs. In this example, the bonus game was triggered by obtaining a
25 predetermined combination of the bonus symbols "B" 60 as illustrated in Fig. 3A, for instance. The bonus triggering symbol "B" is the bonus re-trigger symbol in the bonus game. In other words, any one of the bonus symbols "B" which in combination trigger the bonus game in the base game, is the symbol

5 in the bonus game which provides a bonus re-trigger in the bonus game. In
one embodiment, only one bonus symbol 60 located on any payline 56 is
required to obtain a bonus re-trigger in the bonus game. It should be
appreciated, however, that any combination of the same bonus symbols, which
is more likely to occur in the bonus game than in the primary game, may be
10 used to obtain a bonus re-trigger in the bonus game in accordance with the
present invention. Thus, the present invention provides a bonus game which
increases the chances of obtaining a bonus re-trigger using the same primary
symbols by requiring less of those symbols in the bonus game to obtain a
bonus re-trigger than in the primary game, or by requiring a more likely to
15 occur combination of those symbols in the bonus game to obtain a re-trigger in
the bonus game. Returning now to Fig. 4, the appearance of bonus symbol
"B" 60 in the bonus game, causes a bonus re-trigger for the player in the
bonus game. The bonus re-trigger is 10 free spins in the bonus game as
designated by the bonus display 66.

20 Another embodiment of the present invention is illustrated in Figs. 5A
and 5B. In this embodiment, the bonus re-trigger restructures or changes how
the bonus game is subsequently re-triggered, initiated, played or the structure
or type of the bonus game. Initially, the bonus game was triggered by
obtaining three "B" symbols along a payline as shown in Fig. 3A, for instance.
25 The bonus symbol "B" triggers the bonus re-trigger in the bonus game, which
in this case, changes the bonus game re-triggering symbol combination or
event.

5 In Figs. 5A and 5B, a player obtains two "B" symbols which changes the
bonus re-triggering symbol or bonus mode. In one embodiment, the
probability of obtaining the bonus re-triggering symbol becomes even greater.
Fig. 5A illustrates one embodiment where the player obtains two "B" symbols
60 on one payline 56 in the bonus game which changes the bonus game as
10 indicated by bonus display 68. This changes the bonus game to include
another bonus re-triggering symbol "C."

In Fig. 5B, the bonus re-triggering symbol also now includes the "C"
symbol 69 on any payline as described in bonus display 70. Since the bonus
retrigger symbols now also includes the "C" symbol 69, the player has a better
15 chance of obtaining the bonus re-trigger because both the "B" symbol and the
"C" symbol now provide the bonus re-trigger in this new, modified, or changed
bonus game. The bonus re-trigger could be for instance, additional spins of
the reels wherein a player can obtain bonus awards. The new bonus game
could also change the paylines or other functions of the game, increase or
20 decrease the number of reels in the base game, or change to an entirely new
bonus game.

Referring now to Fig. 6, another embodiment of the present invention is
shown where the bonus re-trigger additionally changes or modifies an award in
the bonus game. In Fig. 6, the player entered the bonus game by obtaining a
25 bonus triggering event that included three bonus symbols "B," designated by
the numeral 60. The bonus symbol "B" is the bonus re-triggering symbol in the
bonus game. The player obtains the bonus re-triggering symbol "B" on
paylines one and three. Thus, the player receives the bonus re-trigger and a

5 modification of the award provided to the player in the bonus game as described by bonus display 72, which includes tripling the bonus award values. It should be appreciated that any modifications of the bonus award values may be made including, but not limited to, multiplying the values by some factor or increasing the bonus award values by a fixed amount.

10 In another embodiment of the present invention illustrated in Figs. 7A, 7B and 7C, an accumulator accumulates bonus re-triggering symbols until a pre-determined number of bonus re-triggering symbols are obtained by the player in the bonus game. In one embodiment, the player accumulates the same bonus re-triggering symbol to re-trigger the bonus game. It should be
15 appreciated that the bonus re-triggering symbols needed to re-trigger the bonus game may include the same bonus re-triggering symbol, a plurality of the same bonus re-triggering symbols or different bonus re-triggering symbols. The bonus re-triggering symbol in the bonus game may be the same symbol as the bonus triggering symbol in the primary game or a different symbol.

20 It should be appreciated that the number of bonus re-triggering symbols needed to re-trigger the bonus game may also be randomly determined by the processor. In this embodiment, a probability of being selected by the processor is associated with the number of bonus re-triggering symbols to be accumulated by the accumulator when the number is randomly determined by
25 the processor.

In Figs. 7A, 7B and 7C, the bonus re-triggering symbol in the bonus game is the same as the bonus triggering symbol in the primary game. The player entered the bonus game by obtaining a bonus triggering event that

5 included three “D” symbols, designated by the numeral 75. In the bonus game, the player must accumulate four “D” symbols in one or more of the free spins of the reels, provided to the player during the bonus game, which is now the bonus re-triggering symbol, to re-trigger the bonus game as indicated by bonus display 74. The bonus re-trigger may be an alternative to the bonus re-triggers described above or employed in a game in addition to the bonus re-triggers described herein. Each time the player obtains a “D” symbol on one of the paylines 56 during play of the bonus game: the symbol is accumulated to one of the symbol displays 78 in the bonus re-trigger symbol accumulator display 76.

15 Referring specifically to Fig. 7A, during play of the bonus games, the player obtains the bonus re-triggering symbol “D”, designated by the numeral 75, on paylines one and three. In this example, the player can obtain one “D” symbol or a plurality of “D” symbols in each turn or spin. Each “D” symbol obtained by the player is accumulated in the bonus re-trigger symbol accumulator display 76. Therefore, the two “D” symbols obtained by the player in this turn are displayed in the bonus re-trigger symbol accumulator display 76. The player must accumulate or obtain two more “D” symbols to re-trigger the bonus game.

25 In the player’s next turn or spin, the player obtains another “D” symbol as illustrated in Fig. 7B. The “D” symbol is accumulated in the bonus re-trigger symbol accumulator display 76. The player only needs to accumulate one more “D” symbol to re-trigger the bonus game.

5 Referring to Fig. 7C, the player obtains a fourth "D" symbol in the bonus game. The final "D" symbol is accumulated in the bonus re-trigger symbol accumulator display 76 as displayed in each of the symbol displays 78. Thus, a bonus re-trigger is provided to the player.

10 It should be appreciated that the player could accumulate the pre-determined number of bonus re-triggering symbols in a single turn or a plurality of turns. It should also be appreciated that this bonus re-trigger could be employed during one or a plurality of bonus games (including re-triggered bonus games). The bonus re-triggering event illustrated in Figs. 7A, 7B and 7C may thus be employed with one or more other bonus re-triggering events in
15 a bonus game. It should also be appreciated that this embodiment can also be employed as a sole bonus re-triggering event in a bonus game.

In another embodiment of the present invention, the player must accumulate the bonus re-triggering symbols in a particular order to obtain a bonus re-trigger in the bonus game. In this embodiment, if the player does not
20 accumulate the bonus re-triggering symbols in the specified order, the player does not obtain a bonus re-trigger. Furthermore, the particular combination of bonus re-triggering symbols and the order of the bonus re-triggering symbols may be pre-determined or randomly determined by the processor.

In one embodiment, the player accumulates the bonus re-triggering
25 symbols one at a time. For instance, if the first and second symbols in a pre-determined order of the bonus re-triggering symbols appears on one or more paylines during the same turn, the player only accumulates the first bonus re-triggering symbol. The player accumulates the other bonus re-triggering

5 symbols in the specified order in the player's remaining turns in the bonus game. It should be appreciated that a player can accumulate the bonus re-triggering symbols in a pre-determined order during a single turn, or during a plurality of turns in the bonus game.

10 In a further embodiment, a bonus re-triggering symbol becomes activated in the bonus game. In this embodiment, the accumulator accumulates only the activated bonus re-triggering symbols until a pre-determined number of activated bonus re-triggering symbols are obtained in the bonus game. The gaming device then provides the player with a bonus re-trigger as described above.

15 In another embodiment, the primary and secondary games are operated in a data network such as the internet. In this manner, a player can access and play the primary and secondary games using a personal computer or similar device that has a data network or internet connection.

20 Accordingly, the present invention provides a gaming device which includes a secondary game triggering event in a primary game which triggers a secondary game, a secondary game re-triggering event in the secondary game which re-triggers the entire secondary game or a portion thereof, wherein the secondary game re-triggering event in the secondary game is more likely to occur in the secondary game than the secondary game
25 triggering event in the primary game. In addition, the gaming device provides another opportunity to re-trigger the secondary game by including a secondary re-triggering symbol accumulator in the secondary game. The accumulator accumulates secondary re-triggering symbols until a pre-determined number of

5 secondary re-triggering symbols are obtained in the secondary game.
Preferably, the secondary game re-triggering event in the secondary game and
the secondary game triggering event in the primary game employ the same
triggering symbols.

While the present invention is described in connection with what is
10 presently considered to be the most practical and preferred embodiments, it
should be appreciated that the invention is not limited to the disclosed
embodiments, and is intended to cover various modifications and equivalent
arrangements included within the spirit and scope of the claims. Modifications
and variations in the present invention may be made without departing from
15 the novel aspects of the invention as defined in the claims, and this application
is limited only by the scope of the claims.